

Dear Distinguished Council Members:

I appreciate and grasp the importance of the decision that you all are debating today in regard to having a vaccine passport in Montgomery County. I believe that your intentions are good, and that you are here to protect and to ensure the safety and good health of all County residents and especially in this pandemic. For the record, I am pro-vaccine, pro-health, pro-business, and pro-unity.

According to Council Member Navarro's email: "As of January 4th, approximately 95% of the total County population has received at least one dose, 83% of the population have received two doses, and 40% of residents that have received two doses have received a booster shot." In one of the highest vaccinated counties in the nation, the residents of Montgomery County have clearly already embraced vaccination. Why would our County require further restrictions if we have previously taken the proper actions necessary to guarantee the safety and well-being of residents?

In the grand scheme of things, vaccines represent one step in the methodology of surviving this pandemic. Eventually, COVID-19 will become endemic, and we will soon be able to live our lives with the least number of restrictions.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 vaccines function more as a genetic therapeutic rather than preventing the virus' transmission from both unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals. Sadly, even taking these precautions has been insufficient to stopping the spread. In fact, many people who have been double vaxxed as well as boosted have had breakthrough cases and contracted the highly transmissible Omicron variant. In 2021, even with Delta, a significantly more detrimental mutation, and lower vaccination rates, we did not implement vaccine mandates or seek further action. Today, we have high vaccination rates and access to therapeutics such as mono-clonal antibody treatment. However, now the County Council would like to incorporate additional restrictions in the midst of a significantly less deadly variant. If the purpose of having a vaccine passport is to promote people to get vaccinated, it seems illogical to put them in place since those who wanted to get vaccinated have while those who did not for medical, religious, or other reasons have not. With the 95% of the population to date receiving the vaccine, why would we want to do this now today in 2022 when we have not in the past?

If we truly believe in the science, then what happened to herd immunity? If herd immunity is here with us, this tells us that we should be in a better position without having people being sick and without the numbers we see today. If we truly believe in vaccinations and the three different CDC and FDA-approved versions being used in United States, why is there still fear within this highly-vaccinated community and therefore, why is there a need for additional restrictions?

It is counterproductive, incomprehensible, and illogical to implement vaccine passports. To make matters worse, this exacerbates the other issue of division in regard to communities of color and minorities who statistically-speaking have fewer vaccination rates compared to White and Asian communities. Unfortunately, if we push this concept

of preventing unvaccinated individuals from eating at restaurants and more generally, participating in society, this then becomes a form of segregation and divisiveness, of which we have seen enough. If we truly wish to embrace inclusivity, justice, equity, and equality, how can we say that we want to keep people especially the afore-mentioned groups out of restaurants and some businesses and tell them they are not permitted to go wherever they have a right to go and to be discriminated against? Even if the intention is for the sake of the common good, in reality, all this does is create a de facto form of segregation and racism, which frankly, I find absolutely abhorrent and in contradiction to Montgomery County's values.

In addition to the social impact there are economic consequences as well: if you look at this strictly as an economic perspective this will have an additional strain on businesses that frankly are already experiencing staffing shortages. Compounding the situation, now the burden will fall on these businesses to enforce these mandates. Frankly on a separate note, all that does is push people out of Montgomery County to go to our sister counties and this makes no sense. This is what I refer to as "the Swiss cheese mentality" with all of these holes in this concept where people can go outside of Montgomery County. Sadly, all we're doing is pushing these residents in Montgomery County to go elsewhere and why would you want to have the economic strain on our businesses, the mental strain on our constituents, and the additional health strain is not going to be beneficial to anyone by having a Vaccine Passport.

At what point will the restrictions stop? What metrics will be used? We will never be Covid-19 free with zero positive rates. So, if we are already 95% vaccinated when will the Council accept the need to remove any of these proposed passport requirements? This is a slippery slope. Our government, and you our elected officials have taken an oath to uphold the US Constitution. By enacting the Vaccine Passport requirements, you are violating our freedoms, rights and frankly are replicating regimes that we fought against, that also placed similar restrictions on its constituents starting with asking for their papers and restrictions on where they could go and work.

The negative consequences of such a Vaccine Passport will have irreversible lasting affect where additional businesses will be forced to close, constituents feeling disenfranchised, and segregated population of pitting the vaccinated against the unvaccinated. We are better that this and I implore you not to go down this road. Any good that may come from this restriction, will be negated, and will have crushing repercussions.

Kind regards,

Sima Blackmon-Hall

Montgomery County Resident and Voter